

Reorganization of the Marine Security Program

Subject Area General

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Reorganization of the Marine Security Program
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Terrorists execute a well-planned operation against an American Embassy: a car bomb detonates near one of the entrances to the embassy compound while a squad of terrorists rushes through the gap created by the bomb. The Marine Security Guard detachment reacts properly to the situation and secures the embassy; however, their operational commander fires upon the Marines. The Marines are faced with two threats, a squad of terrorists and their own operational commander. Because the operational commander is not a Marine, but a civilian who works for the Department of State, the Marine Corps cannot take disciplinary action. This is only one example of the numerous issues concerning the Marine Security Guard Program. The Marine Corps has surrendered operational control of its Marines. The current Marine Security Guard Battalion arrangement is outdated and the United States Department of State possesses excessive operational control over United States Marines.

In order to return operational control to the Marines, the level of control exercised by the Department of State (DOS) must be reduced and the responsibility of leading the Marines on MSG duty should be returned to the Marine Corps. As such, the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) sets the guideline for the current operational and administrative relationship between DOS and the Marine Corps must be

amended in order to better allow Marines to take control of threats they face as Marine Security Guards.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

The primary mission of the Marine Security Guard Battalion (MSG Bn) is to provide internal security at designated United States diplomatic and consular posts to prevent the compromise of classified information and equipment vital to the interest of the United States of America.¹ The secondary mission of the MSG Bn is to safeguard Americans and American property located within United States diplomatic and consular facilities. Marine Security Guards (MSG) are responsible for interior security and are authorized to operate outside the compounds of a diplomatic mission only during extreme emergencies.²

While serving as MSGs, Marines are subject to the control of the DOS by virtue of the MOA between the Marine Corps and the Department of State. The first Memorandum of Agreement was entered into between the Marine Corps and Department of State in 1948 to establish baseline regulations regarding the assignment of Marines to serve as guards at designated diplomatic posts. The MOA has been

¹ Department of State (DOS) employees commonly refer to an embassy, consulate, or any diplomatic facility as a "Mission" or "Post."

² Memorandum of Agreement Between the U. S. Department of State and the United States Marine Corps, January 9, 2001, pg 4.

through numerous revisions since the first group of three hundred MSGs were assigned to diplomatic posts overseas in 1949. Regardless of the changes that have been made to the MOA, the current Memorandum of Agreement signed in 2001 still allows DOS excessive control over Marines serving as embassy and consulate guards. This control exerted by the Department of State often causes issues when it comes to the Marines' operational and administrative responsibilities.

The MOA dictates the mission of the Marine Security Guard Program, the qualifications for assignment to the program, the operational and administrative responsibilities of the State Department and the Marine Corps, and the overall financial responsibility. According to the Memorandum of Agreement, the mission of the Marine Security Guard Battalion is to "exercise command, less operational control, of Marines assigned to MSG detachment...[the Bn] is responsible for the training, assignment, administration, logistical support of Marine Corps unique items, and discipline of Marines assigned to the Battalion."³ The State Department has operational control of the Marines assigned to overseas posts. The State Department appointed Ambassador, or Chief of Mission,

³ Memorandum of Agreement Between the U. S. Department of State and the United States Marine Corps, January 9, 2001, pg 8.

at each post has operational control over the Marine Security Guard detachment assigned to that embassy or consulate. The Ambassador exercise operational control through the post's Regional Security Officer (RSO).

SEPARATE CHAINS OF COMMAND

The RSO, a federal law enforcement agent from the Diplomatic Security Branch of the Department of State, is the chief of security for the diplomatic post and the immediate operational commander for the Marine Security Guard Detachment. Since the Regional Security Officer exercises day-to-day control over the Marine Security Guard Detachment, the RSO is responsible for the training and operational proficiency of the Marines.⁴ However, due to the numerous other duties of the RSO, it is really the Detachment Commander, a Marine staff non-commissioned officer, who exercises the day-to-day control over the detachment of Marines.

Marine Security Guard Battalion orders dictate that in order to remain proficient in their diverse duties, Marines are required to fulfill a host of training requirements while assigned to MSG duty. In accordance with the Battalion orders, Marines are required to conduct a minimum

⁴ Ibid, pg 6.

of two reactionary drills per month in response to numerous real world scenarios, such as intruders in the embassy, bomb threats, and demonstrations outside the embassy.⁵ A Marine Inspecting Officer conducts semi-annual inspections (SAI) in order to verify the level of proficiency of the Marines of the detachment. However, the inspector has no jurisdiction concerning the proficiency of the figurehead operational commander of the detachment, the Regional Security Officer. The Inspecting Officer makes recommendation to the Regional Security Officer concerning any discrepancies, but the RSO is not required to take action.

Upon completion of the SAI, the Inspecting Officer separately briefs the Ambassador, the RSO, and the MSGs on the result of the inspection.⁶ The results of the semi-annual inspection are submitted to the Marine Security Guard Company Commanding Officer, a Lieutenant Colonel. After reviewing the semi-annual inspection results, the company commander reemphasizes any concerns or issues in the endorsement letter to the SAI. With the approval of the Company Commander, the SAI is submitted to the MSG BN S-3

⁵ Battalion Order 5040.1M: Command Inspection Program, Marine Security Guard Battalion, November 22, 2005, pg 4-6.

⁶ Semi-Annual Inspections are normally conducted in three to five days, depending on the size of the MSG Detachment. The Detachment is inspected concerning Marine Corps administration, training, operational readiness, security, collateral duties, and post relations.

for eventual submission to the office of the Marine Corps' Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations (DC, PP&O). A Marine officer assigned to PP&O is tasked with reviewing all semi-annual inspections from the various diplomatic posts and must then represent the interests of the Marine Corps to the State Department.⁷ However, this is a collateral duty and many of the SAIs are not reviewed or addressed.

The detachment is inspected every six months and all deficiencies noted in the SAI are expected to be corrected. A Marine's failure to correct these deficiencies may lead to a relief for cause. As the senior Marine, the Detachment Commander is ultimately responsible for the detachment. In most cases, the Detachment Commander will be the only individual affected by a poor grade in the SAI. Because the Marine Inspecting Officer can only make recommendations to the Regional Security Officer, the RSO is outside the Marine Corps chain of command and is not affected by the results of a semi-annual inspection. In order for the RSO to take action on an issue raised in a SAI, the RSO must be directed to do so by the Department of State. However, due to the different organizational cultures, SAIs are not

⁷ SAIs are conducted twice a year for every MSG detachment throughout the world. Currently, there are 136 MSG detachments. A total of 272 SAIs are submitted to PP&O. There is only one officer to review and address all the issues noted in the SAIs.

considered a high priority by the RSOs. Numerous security concerns identified during the SAIs are ignored, and the same issues are reported year after year.

In fact, the RSO is very similar to an absentee landlord. At numerous posts worldwide, a RSO may only train with their Marines two or three times a year, vice two or three times a month, in the above described scenarios. Many RSOs do not understand the capabilities and limitations of their Marines. This is problematic because RSOs are required to endorse the operational plans for the embassy, and, more often than not, the plans have been developed and written by a SNCO and the RSO is completely unfamiliar with the plans.⁸ Unfortunately, while the Marine Corps stresses the importance of leaders training their subordinates and participating alongside their Marines in the training, the Department of State and its Diplomatic Security officers do not necessarily agree with the importance of this philosophy. The effects of which can be seen in the daily interaction between the RSO and the Marines under their command. Many MSG detachments are not confident with the proficiency level of the RSO due in large part to his or her lack of participation in training and other MSG

⁸ Detachment Commander Billets are opened to Staff Sergeants and Gunnery Sergeants from all MOSSs. There is a varying degree of experience; therefore, the plans differ greatly.

affairs.

A NEW REALTIONSHIP

There is little doubt RSOs are well trained as federal law enforcement agents; however, too many RSOs have little to no experience in military operations. Unfortunately, regardless of the capability of the Regional Security Officer to lead the Marines under his command, under the terms of the MOA, the Marine Corps does not possess the authority to relieve or discipline an RSO.

The only way for the Marine Corps to make changes to its existing relationship with the Department of State is to renegotiate the Memorandum of Agreement. In doing so, the Marine Corps' goal should be to exercise more operational control over its Marines. This can be accomplished by removing operational control of the MSG detachment from the RSO and establishing a senior First Lieutenant or Captain as the link between the Marines and the Ambassador. This would allow the Marine Corps to exercise better control over its Marines.

Because it will be difficult to staff all 136 embassy/consulate detachments with company-grade officers, a comprehensive review should be conducted to verify and/or justify the need for Marines at an embassy or consulate.

Currently, there are Marines serving guard duty at low threat posts. Many of the detachments at these posts could be deactivated with no real impact. In the event the threat level increases suddenly and additional protection is necessary, Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Teams can be used to provide security for the post.

Assigning Company-grade officers to American embassies will benefit the Marine Corps in the long run. The Company-grade officers would be assigned to the program for a minimum of three years. Before leaving for their posts, officers would spend the first two months being trained in the proper operation of a detachment. The next six to ten months would be dedicated to language training. Upon completion of this training, the officer would be assigned to an embassy/consulate for two years. After just three years, the Marine Corps will find itself with an additional cadre of Foreign Area Officers and Regional Area Officers.

CONCLUSION

The current relationship between the USMC and DOS needs to be revised. The Marine Corps should renegotiate the Memorandum of Agreement because the current operational relationship between the Marine Corps and the Department of State is outdated. The current threats in the "long war"

will require more proactive leaders who are already trained to lead a small tactical unit. The Marine Security Guard Battalion should be restructured to allow for more capable commanders to lead Marines assigned to embassy/consulate duty. By replacing RSOs with company-grade officers, the Marine Corps will have more reliable leaders commanding its Marines. A Marine officer may better address long-standing security concerns and other issues with the MSG detachment at the post. The inspections conducted by the Marine Corps will be taken more seriously and personnel will be held accountable for reoccurring discrepancies. Lastly, the assignment of officers to diplomatic posts will assist in the development of a cadre of regional experts.

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